

# **EXPLORING A RURAL ENGLISH TEACHER'S LIVED EXPERIENCES OF ASSESSMENT PRACTICES IN A BLENDED LEARNING ENACTMENT: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY**

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## **Abstract**

Although extensive studies have put a focus on the enactment of blended learning in English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom, there is a paucity of research into the teacher's lived experiences of how they enact assessment in the blended learning activities. To fill such gap, this paper reports on a narrative inquiry of an EFL teacher's lived experiences of conducting assessment during blended learning in the pandemic era. The study's findings shed light on the ineffectiveness of the assessment practice during the blended learning enactment, particularly in the context of rural schools. Albeit the participating teacher in this study was fully engaged to conduct assessment from his past experiences, two major problems hinder such a practice: students' unsubmitted assignments and poor Internet connection. Based on these findings, teachers are encouraged to find an alternative assessment practice during the blended learning, such as portfolio assessment. This suggestion is anchored by the fact that the assessment practice was not technically assisted during the blended learning activities.

**Keywords:** assessment, blended learning, lived experience, narrative inquiry

## **INTRODUCTION**

In recent years, the use of blended learning to provide course material to a diverse group of students is becoming more common in educational institutions. According to Castle and McGuire (2010), blended learning is widely used because of its potential to offer flexible access to information and teaching at any moment, from any place, and cost-effectiveness for institutions of higher education. Nowadays, impacted by coronavirus disease (COVID-19), many educational institutions in Indonesia are running blended learning. Such a learning approach combines the advantages of face-to-face and online learning to suit each individual which is a way of learning that is versatile, open and meaningful (Seffner & Kepler, 2015). Blended learning focused learner autonomy by utilizing information technology to build and facilitate positive learning (Quvanch & Kew, 2020). According to Albiladi and Alshareef (2019), blended learning can also be easily Applied to the four language skills. This subsequently engages learners to learn both virtually and face-to-face.

Experience refers to an event encountered by someone (Lopez & Vanegaz, 2020). In the context of teaching, experience has an important element namely a full story of what someone experienced and what he/she did in the past as a teacher that provides insight into how experiences shape his/her knowledge and make decisions about assessment. According Xu dan Liu (2009), teacher's lived experiences in doing assessment shed light on the importance of conducting assessment for future learning activities. The insights teachers obtained in the previous experiences lead to an overview for the current assessment practice in the classes. An empirical study by Rasyidah, Triana, and Saukah (2020) yields an evidence that teachers' past experiences of assessment practice affect the way they carry out the present assessment practice.

Many previous studies have investigated and explored blended learning. Previous researchers have highlighted aspects of blended learning, for example Astria (2020) revealed that the application of blended learning is successful in the teaching and learning process and engages students in learning actively. Althomali and Alzeer (2020) showed in their study that blended learning leads to joyful learning activities for students as they participated in a variety of tasks. Alshareef (2019) contends that blended learning is appropriately enacted in teaching language skills. Recently, Dahmash (2020) revealed that blended learning has motivated EFL students to learn writing skills and encouraged them to look for resources online.

Given the many existing studies on blended learning, little empirical evidence is primarily focused on the aspect of assessment practice in blended learning enacted by English teachers, whereas assessment is part of the teaching and learning process which aims to improve the performance of the assessor and the person being assessed. As revealed Black and Wiliam (2006) as cited in Khairil and Mokshein (2018), assessment is a series of collecting all the tasks performed by a teacher to students then the assessment will be used as a reference in determining how the learning process will come. Recently, researchers have only focused on exploring assessments based on classroom learning, as has been done.

In particular, previous research focuses on the application and model of the assessment. For example, Zhank and Stock (2003) show that teachers rely more on objective classroom evaluation assessments and show increased attention to evaluation consistency. Musawy (2009) contends that the main emphasis of current evaluation activities is on assessment, class discussions, class assignments, assignments, and seminars. It is thus essential to further explore teacher's lived experiences in conducting assessment during blended learning implementation.

Previous studies mentioned earlier in this paper were primarily carried out on face-to-face learning in the classroom, and were also mostly conducted on

teachers at the university as participants. There is a paucity of research that examines English as a foreign language teachers' lived experiences of assessment practice in blended learning in the schooling contexts. To fill such void, the present study looked into the lived experiences of an EFL teacher from a rural area in East Java, Indonesia, with regard to his assessment practice during the implementation of blended learning in the school.

## **METHOD**

### **Design**

To explore teacher's lived experiences, a narrative inquiry was employed in this study. Narrative inquiry is the first and most important way to understand experiences. John Dewey's theory of experience, as cited from Clandinin and Connelly (2008) provides a foundation for attending experience through three-dimensional space for narrative inquiry, namely the dimensions of temporary, place, and sociality. This three-dimensional space of narrative inquiry allows for investigation into the multilevel life experiences of researchers and participants. In this study, the stories that are told and lived are situated and understood in the larger cultural, social, and institutional narrative.

### **Participant's Profile**

The participant in this study is Erick (pseudonym, male, 47 years old). My initial meeting with Erick began when he took his son to practice martial arts. Since that, I often met and got acquainted with him. Erick is a senior English teacher at a secondary school based in Bangkalan regency, East Java, Indonesia with more than 25 years of teaching experiences. He obtained a Master's in English Education from a private university in Malang, East Java, Indonesia. Beside teaching in formal institution, Erick run an English course at the afternoon after schooling time. Impacted by COVID-19 pandemic, Erick transformed his teaching from face-to-face to blended learning model in order to help his students engage in the online learning activities.

### **Data Collection and Analysis Procedures**

Data in this study were garnered through semi-structured interview. This interview design enables participants to voice their experiences without any restricted questions. The interview was done face-to-face using participant's national language by adhering to COVID-19 health protocols. It lasted around 45 minutes to an hour. Since the study was qualitatively anchored, the data obtained from the interview were analyzed following the qualitative framework for data analysis procedure. First, I read the interview transcripts multiple times to understand global meaning of the participant's stories. Further, several salient themes were highlighted in order to focus on the main issues related to the

research questions. Afterward, the themes emerged from such a step were coded as the findings of the study.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Rural teacher assessment practices in blended learning enactment**

In the past, before the pandemic and he was still doing face-to-face learning in the class, he always explained the assessment procedures to his students. There are three aspects of the assessment that he used, that are knowledge, skills and attitudes but currently on pandemic, he didn't explain about it, because he made an assessment that was not in accordance with the procedure.

In blended learning practice Erick did face to face learning at school he used it to explain his materials and recognize the character of students to conduct an attitude assessment by observation and for the students that doing learning process at home by online he gave them task by online tests to conducted cognitive, and skill assessment. he told that:

#### **Excerpt 1**

*During learning in the class, I can recognize the character of my students, I make observations to them about their behavior as an attitude assessment. Not only in class, I also pay attention to how often students respond and submit assignments to me because by responding and collecting assignments, it means students can appreciate a teacher, discipline and responsibility, it is also a factor in attitude assessment. Meanwhile, for cognitive assessment, I apply individual assessment by giving a test when students learn online at home and for skill assessment I ask my student made a speaking video and I asked them sent to me, but the fact many students did not submit their assignments.*

For the first time Erick using blended learning assessment, it is about more than one year, Erik conducted an assessment according to the procedure, he did he gave grades to his students according to the ability of the students and how often they collected the assignments that had been given and how often he followed the learning process. He said that :

#### **Excerpt 2**

*First, at the beginning I did a blended learning assessment, many of my students did not collect assignments so I gave them grades according to the performance of their learning outcomes such as how often they take lessons and how often*

*do they collect assignments, if they rarely collect assignments, they will get bad scores and if they always collect assignments well, they will get good scores*

### **The Rural Teacher's Problems Faced in Assessment Practices in Blended Learning Enactmen**

But the fact in asseessment practice in blended learning, Erick complained that many students did not collect their assignments so they get a low score. He stated:

#### **Excerpt 3**

*in assessment practice in blended learning the studens did not submit assignments that I gave and many student scores were blank, and it made they didn't complete in English lesson. Not only that they also feel difficult to continue their eduation in higher school because they got bad scores in their raports.*

He ever asked to his students why they didn't submit assignments? then the same reason arose when online learning was implemented, they complained about the unstable network and also there are some students said they did not understand about the tasks but they lazy and afraid to ask the teacher. He faces the same problem with online learning, he is confused what strategy should he use to be able to overcome this problem and can assess the ability of students in English lessons properly. it is reflected in his statement :

#### **Excerpt 4**

*I confuse how I will conducted asseessment to my students if my students rarely collected their task and I can't force them to collect their tasks because of some reasons that they have ever said. If I follow the assessment procedures like what I do in the previous assessment, then there will be many students whose get scores are below standard and they didn't complete in English lesson.*

Then to reduce students who do not collect the assignments that I give online, I ask them to submit their assignments during face-to-face learning at school but this does not have a big impact because students rarely participate in face-to-face learning. He said:

Excerpt 5

*I've asked my students to submit their assignments when they come to school if they can't submit their task online but some of them didn't come to school.*

He also said that he was confused about what was the right strategy for this situation, he could not innovate in the use of media, especially online media. He conveyed that:

Excerpt 6

*I can't innovate using various online learning media, I faced with problems of students who rarely participate in lessons, especially students who did not collect assignments with the reason there is no signal and don't have a smartphone, so that the teachers easily conducted assessments optimally.*

**Rural Teacher Solve That Problems in Assessment Practices in Blended Learning Enactment**

Based on Erick's previous experience, and seeing the problems that arise in the assessment process using blended learning and paying attention to the complaints that have been conveyed by students, then now Erick decides in conducting an assessment using blended learning he takes the value from the previous semester and the scores can increase depending on the level of student activity

Excerpt 7

*I decided to made an assessment by taking the assess in the previous semester for eleventh grades, and for tenth grades who just entered to school I gave a assess equivalent to minimum criteria competent. I feel sorry and afraid that if I give them a bad score, it will make them difficult continue to higher school like a previous year*

His decision to give good grades to his students during the pandemic was teased by other teachers. she told that :

Excerpt 8

*I was once insinuated by another teacher, he said to me "Mr. Erick, you have students who are very good in English , in English subject all students get good scores and no students are remedial while in other lessons many students get bad scores and remedies ".*

The statement made him offended because he knew that the teacher meant to tease him but Erick didn't care about it, because he had his own assessment of his students in the current condition of Covid 19.

On the other hand, he found that the student's assignments that were submitted to him tended to be the same from one student to another so that there was an indication that they were cheating on the answers from their friends and they did not do their own assignments, so it can be said that the current assessment is not purely the result of students' abilities, like what he said at the interview :

Excerpt 9

*The student assignments submitted to me are almost all the same, I am sure they are working on the assignment together, not working on it alone. but I still appreciate their efforts by providing additional score.*

The findings, and problems that appeared in the assessment process using the blended learning method made him more focus on behavior assessment than on cognitive assessments. He said :

Excerpt 10

*cognitive scores is not really important because English is a science that can be learned later, it is not a measure of student success in the future but students' attitudes will determine their future because attitudes cannot be learned, but attitudes can be shaped and guided.*

this incident reminded him of past events, He ever had a student with poor English language skills poor English so he got bad cognitive scores but he had a very good attitude and now he has good English language skills, moreover he is an English teacher.

However, this condition should not be allowed to remain for too long, however the teacher must find the right assessment strategy that is able to measure cognitive abilities and skills well for apply in blended learning later. it is same with Erick's opinion, He said :

Excerpt 11

*It need the right strategy for this problem so that blended learning can be implemented in rural schools and teachers can carry out the assessment properly.*

then in the interview process Erick also conveyed his plan about the assessment strategy that he would do in the next assessment besides that he also expressed his hopes for future education. He expressed his plan, and wish, he said:

Excerpt 12

*So far there is still no proper strategy for this problem , for next assessments I want to try using portfolio assessment as an alternative assessment practice during the blended learning, and I wish the learning process is carried out face-to-face in the classroom by complying with health*

## **DISCUSSION**

The assessments carried out by Erick used blended learning, influenced by his past experience when conducting assessments using online learning. This condition echoes previous research by Xu and Liu (2009) explaining that teacher's past experience of assessment practice greatly influence the present practice.. Importantly, complexities he encountered during the assessment practice using blended learning was the same as in the online learning. Assessment is part of the teaching and learning process which is to improve the performance of the assessor and the person being assessed. According to Black and Wiliam, (2006) as cited in Khairil and Mokshein (2018), assessment is a series of collecting all tasks performed by a teacher to students then the assessment is used as a reference in determining how the learning process in the future should be enacted. In the present study, the participant referred back to the students' past assessment as a reference to assess the students' current competence in the class. Interestingly, this study reveals how the participant considers non-cognitive matters as the most essential assessment target. That is to say, students' character is seen important to support the learning process.

The personal and social circumstances are contributive to the participant's lived experiences. Feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic responses, and spiritual dispositions are all examples of the personal conditions (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). In doing the assessment, Erick faced a dilemma. Such a practice is influenced by contextual conditions depicted in the interview. First, as an English teacher, the participant is responsible for assessing students' competence. However, this is hampered by the facts that student tasks were not completely submitted since in some cases many of the students were lacking of online facility. Thus, the only alternative carried out was to give a minimum assessment score for the students. Another dilemma is derived from collegial relationship in the teaching profession. As shared by the participant in the interview, his colleagues' negative responses were influential on the assessment practice. The present study uncovers a salient and common hindrance of assessment practice during blended



learning in rural area schooling. As such, the interview data unpack how the participant was baffled with administering the assessment under inadequate facility and students' demotivation factor. Previous research confirmed this finding (Yan, Zhang, & Fan, 2018).

## CONCLUSION

The present study attempts to reveal an Indonesian English teacher's lived experiences of enacting assessment during the blended learning implementation. Findings suggest that conducting an assessment during the blended learning method is less effective in rural schools. The primary concern in assessing students' learning activities in blended learning is the limited observation teachers do if compared to the classroom teachings. Although it is difficult to conduct assessment, blended learning is considered an effective teaching method for rural schools since the adoption of face-to-face and online activities enable both teachers and students to interact communicatively. From the findings, teachers are encouraged to find an alternative assessment practice during the blended learning, such as portfolio assessment.

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